
Lanka assures India Tamils will return home from camps

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NEW DELHI: Sri Lanka on Wednesday assured India that it would ensure that Tamils, displaced during the military operations against LTTE, return to their homes after their camps are dismantled within six months.

The assurance was conveyed by a high-level Sri Lankan delegation which included Basil Rajapaksa, President's Special Envoy and G B Rajapaksa, Defence Secretary, which met foreign minister S M Krishna here.

Krishna told reporters later that India would assist in the resettlement and rehabilitation process of the displaced persons. New Delhi also remains committed to demining activity to ensure their safe return. The Sri Lankan government's commitment to devolve "considerable power" to its provinces was also reaffirmed by the delegation, according to the minister. He said the delegation had agreed to India's suggestion to allow the ship "Captain Ali" to off-load the relief material meant for displaced persons in Northern Sri Lanka. These items will now be routed through the Red Cross.

Earlier describing his discussions with Krishna as very "positive", Basil Rajapaksa said "we have given a positive reply to the Indian government and most of the requests have been approved. I should not mention what is going to be... but definitely it will be for the people in the camps." On whether the ship will be allowed to off-load, Basil said "we have fulfilled the requirements". Rajapaksa said he also had useful talks with the Indian delegation, especially regarding a programme to resettle all internally displaced persons who are now in relief camps. "We have a 180-day programme. First how to do demining. The Indian government had earlier agreed to send four teams but now on the request made to them, they are trying to increase the number by 8. That will be helpful to resettle these people," Rajapaksa said. Krishna said he also told the Lankan delegation about the need to "strictly adhere" to the understanding reached in October last on matters relating to fishing. "The Sri Lankan government clarified that it does not contemplate putting up any structures at Katchchativu islet," the minister added. The reported move by the Sri Lankan Navy to set up a base in Katchchativu had drawn the ire of a cross-section of people and parties in Tamil Nadu. Courtesy: timesofindia.indiatimes.com